

9/28/2010: Iowa football notebook



Kirk Ferentz,
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IOWA CITY, Iowa – Kirk Ferentz made the following clear at his weekly press conference on Tuesday: He's not into statistics, especially early in the season.

The fact that the No. 17 Iowa Hawkeyes have the top overall defense in the country through four weeks doesn't phase the 12-year head coach. Neither does the fact that his team is ranked 17th, and for once, considered a favorite when it plays No. 22 Penn State on Oct. 2 inside Kinnick Stadium.

Ferentz is all about the present, and he knows the task of winning a third straight game against the Nittany Lions this Homecoming weekend is enormous.

"I'm expecting this thing to be a real 60-minute game," Ferentz said. "Hopefully we'll be there in the fourth quarter."

The biggest threat Penn State brings into this year's meeting is its ground attack, which is led by running back Evan Royster.

The Nittany Lion senior rushed for a career-high 187 yards in Penn State's 22-13 win over Temple on Sept. 25, and currently sits a mere 183 rushing yards behind Penn State great Curt Warner as the school's all-time leading rusher.

"He's a smooth and efficient player," Ferentz said. "I think he does everything well. Not that he's a flashy player, but he's very productive. You look at the bottom line, his statistics are normally very good. That's how he's gotten to where he's gotten career-wise.

"He just kind of does it with ease. That's what good players do."

Take me back to the start

Many, including Ferentz, pinpoint the last time Penn State visited Iowa City as a turning point for this Hawkeye program.

To rehash the scene, the date was Nov. 8, 2008. Iowa came in unranked at 5-4, while the Nittany Lions were 9-0 and ranked third nationally. Cornerback Shaun Prater recalled it being a cold day. The first thought entering the mind of offensive lineman Julian Vandervelde was the "Greene Out" done, as the Iowa student section wore green as a way to promote former Hawkeye running back Shonn Greene and his Hesiman Trophy candidacy.

The momentum shifted in Iowa's favor that faithful day when safety Tyler Sash came up with an interception of Penn State's Daryll Clark that helped set up a monumental 31-yard field goal from Daniel Murray that won the game, 24-23, for Iowa.

"Clark overthrew the ball, and I was in the right spot," Sash said Tuesday as he recalled that play. "I don't remember a lot of it. It's kind of like I blacked out or something. I think that was one of the first big plays that I had made since I became a starter."

Since that time, 20 games have come and gone. The Hawkeyes have won 17 of those 20 contests, including a BCS bowl.

Vandervelde credits the senior class from that 2008 season as being the ones who helped pave the way for what has since been an ongoing success.

"Those leaders really kind of set the table for the sort of mentality that we have now," Vandervelde said. "We go into every game expecting to win, no matter what the score is in the fourth quarter. We always think that we can find a way to pull it out no matter what the situation is.

"I think that definitely started with those guys."

Daniels surprised by accolade

Tuesday afternoon, it was assumed at the Hayden Fry Football Complex that everyone knew about Iowa junior defensive tackle Mike Daniels being named a co-Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week.

Everyone, except Mike Daniels.

The 6-1, 275-pound lineman said Tuesday he was unaware until a reporter had brought it up.

After Iowa defeated Ball State 45-0 last weekend, Daniels credited his six-tackle performance to continuously studying game and practice film throughout the week. It's a habit he said he has gotten into doing any chance he gets.

Daniels' recent success on the gridiron, however, hasn't made him into the type of "big man on campus" that maybe someone like fellow defensive lineman Adrian Clayborn is.

Which if you ask Daniels, is just fine with him.

"It feels as though being low key keeps you grounded more. It helps you stay focused," Daniels said.

DJK closing in on milestones

It isn't a matter of if senior wide receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos becomes Iowa's all-time leading receiver, but when.

After his performance against Ball State that consisted of four catches for 87 yards and two touchdowns, Johnson-Koulianos is on the brink of two school records.

The Campbell, Ohio native sits 13 receptions shy of Kevin Kasper's all-time receptions mark of 157. He is also just 130 yards away from tying the 2,271-yard career receiving mark set by Tim Dwight.

Ferentz noted that Johnson-Koulianos having had four years of playing experience factors into him reaching these marks, but he also doesn't want to take away from the significance of them, either.

"That's not something you just take for granted, the fact that he has been able to stay healthy," Ferentz said about Johnson-Koulianos' career success. "He has been productive. He's come up with a lot of big plays for us."